

# Orbital Bomb Rationalizing Jolts Officials

By Murrey Marder  
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Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara has set the scene for controversy over whether the United States has jettisoned a bargaining point against Soviet space bombs.

Ranking officials of the State Department and of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency appeared to be caught by surprise over the timing of McNamara's Friday announcement that the Soviet Union may be testing an orbital bomb.

Phil G. Goulding, Assistant Secretary for

Public Affairs, when asked yesterday about inter-departmental consultations, replied: "We made advance distribution of the (McNamara) statement within the Government a week ago."

## Unaware of Conference

What produced one major dispute, however, was not in McNamara's statement but in his answers to questions. The State Department was unaware that McNamara was holding a press conference until it was over, and was unprepared to discuss the international consequences of his disclosures.

McNamara said that what the United States has chosen to describe as a Soviet Fractional Orbit Bombardment System "is not a violation" of the Outer Space Treaty. The treaty, designed to bar the orbiting or stationing of weapons in outer space, was ratified by the United States and the Soviet Union less than a month ago, on Oct. 10.

The reason such a weapons system does not violate the space treaty, McNamara said, is because the space weapons would be fired "in a fractional orbit, not a full orbit . . ."

Such weapons "could circle the earth for several

orbits before firing, McNamara agreed.

## Would Violate Treaty

That would be a clear violation of the treaty. But McNamara said he thought it unlikely that they would be employed in full orbit or orbits, because there would be "no (military) advantage" to that and there would be greater risk of discovery.

Military opinion is divided on that. But in any event, several diplomatic experts privately expressed surprise that McNamara conceded in advance what they believed should be left to the Russians to try to prove: that a

"fractional orbit" is permitted by the space treaty.

The treaty itself does not define the meaning of the term "orbit." It simply forbids signatory nations from placing "in orbit around the earth any objects carrying nuclear weapons of mass destruction . . ." Some of the scores of other nations that signed the treaty might choose to challenge whether the term "orbit" applies to parts of orbits as well.

Sen. Henry M. Jackson (D-Wash.) who will open hearings Monday on missileery, promptly questioned McNamara's interpretation.

"I want to find out if there has been a technical violation of the space treaty," said Jackson. "In my judgment," he said, "there has been a good-faith violation . . . the idea of the treaty was to prohibit in space such terror weapons."

## No Breach Unless . . .

Other specialists pointed out that there could be no violation of the treaty, technical or otherwise, unless the Soviets were conducting tests with a nuclear warhead attached. Until that is done, these specialists said,

no claim of violation could be made; once a warhead was attached, they added, it could be a moot point whether the space treaty was violated, because the world could then be in the midst of World War III.

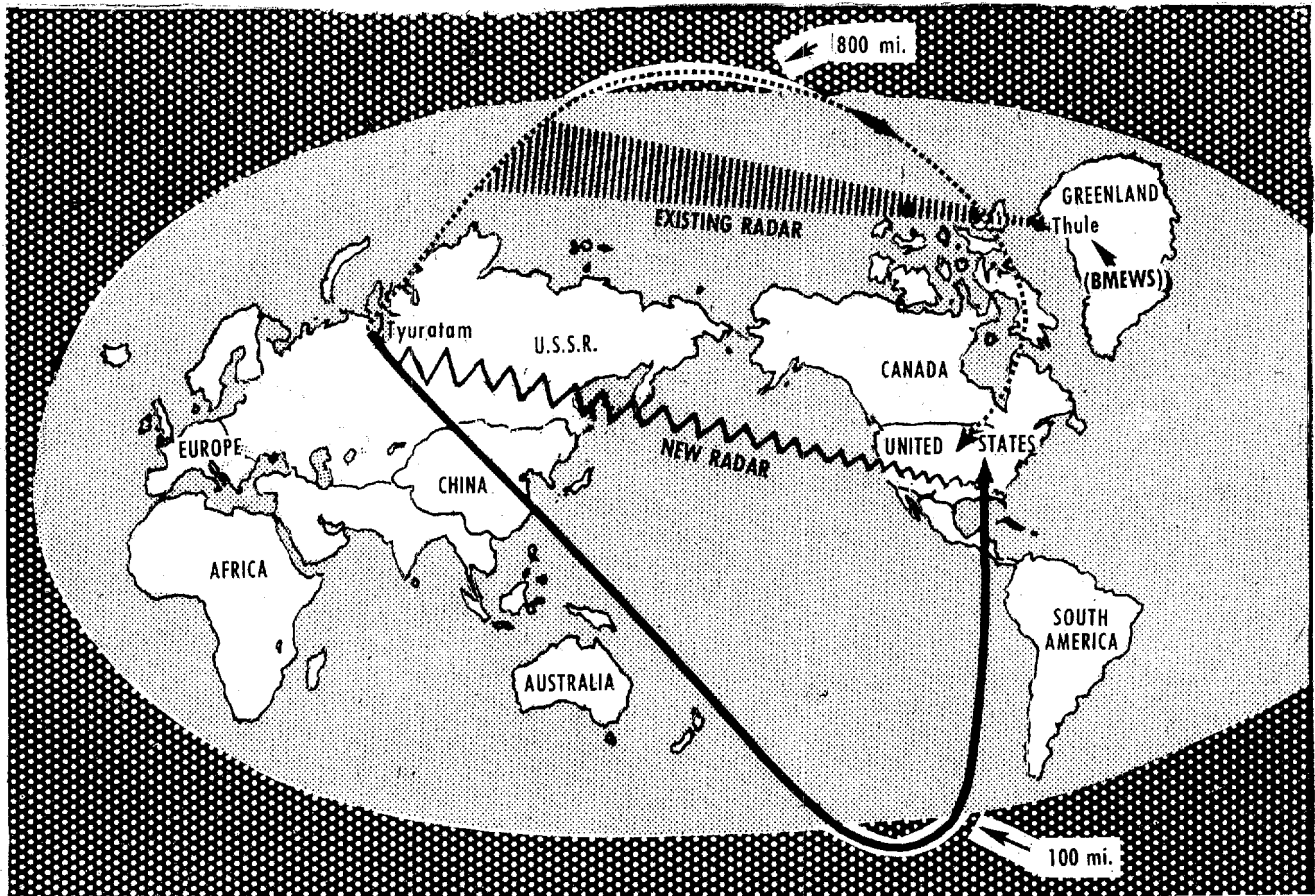
McNamara's handling of the subject indicated to many specialists that the Administration is anxious to avoid picking a quarrel with the Russians on a point it probably cannot prove, to avoid endangering U.S. hopes for getting American-Soviet negotiations to limit the immensely costly nuclear missile arms race. McNamara is intensely interested in that possibility.

## Of One Voice

The State Department, which has the legal responsibility for interpreting the Outer Space Treaty, sidestepped all questions about it yesterday, after debating what to say. "You have Secretary McNamara's statement," a spokesman said; "We believe the ground has been covered in his statement and I have nothing to add." When asked if the Department knew in advance what McNamara would say,

the spokesman replied: "I have no comment."

In New York, Ambassador Arthur J. Goldberg, who handled negotiations on the space treaty at the United Nations, declined to say if he thought the Soviet system would violate the treaty. Goldberg said the Soviet move "is a matter of great concern. The Government can only speak with one voice on this matter and he (McNamara) is our spokesman on this subject."



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**BACKDOOR APPROACH**—The Soviet Union is testing an orbital rocket which could hit the U.S. from the south, flying 100 miles high, as shown by the solid line. This would evade the Ballistic Missile Early Warning System (BMEWS) radars from detecting an ICBM launched against

the U.S. ICBMs would fly over the North Pole, as shown by the dotted line, and would reach a peak height of 800 miles. New over-the-horizon radars are being built to detect launches hidden from BMEWS. The radar signals go around the earth by bouncing off the ionosphere.